N°. V.

THE

THESPIAN MIRROR.

SATURDAY EVENING, JANUARY 25, 1806.

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF MR. COOPER.

(Concluded from our last.)

Mr. Cooper's friends now abandoned the idea of practice on provincial stages; Mr. Holcroft again took him in hand, and selected some of Shakspeare's most distinguished characters for his instruction. He made him recite passages, and would explain the nature of the characters, the situations in which they are placed; the passions by which they are influenced. Thus he taught him that great requisite of a performer, to conceive the intention of the author, and enter into the feelings of the character. After some months close attention, in which the extraordinary talents of his youthful pupil were rapidly evolved, he was thought ready for a first appearance. He accordingly, at the early age of 18, performed in one week, the arduous characters of Hamlet and Macbeth, on the boards of Covent-Garden, to overflowing houses, and with the most flattering applause.

On this subject we have heard that Mr. Tyler, at present of the New-York Theatre, had belonged to one of the provincial companies in which Cooper had held a very humble station. Mr. Tyler, forming other engagements with Mr. Henry, quitted the British for the American stage. Shortly after his arrival, he received a letter from one of his Thespian friends, who after regaling him with a variety of Green-Room history, added, "and now prepare yourself for an astonishment—that identical Mr. Cooper, who a few months ago, was playing the very underling characters at our theatre, and who appeared extremely incompetent, is now performing Hamlet with applause in London!"

After Mr. Cooper had met so favourable a reception from the London audience, he was offered a liberal engagement; but as he was not yet capable of sustaining a line of characters, he was expected to take such business as he was able to perform. This engagement he declined. "Aut Cæsar aut nullus" seems to have been already his object, and he refused any

secondary situation. He accordingly retired to the country, where he employed himself in cultivating his dramatic talent.

Shortly after this period, Mr. WIGNELL, who had visited England to raise a reinforcement for the Philadelphia company, heard of him. He immediately entered into a negociation which was promptly concluded, and in a few days from its commencement Mr. COOPER was on the Atlantic, voyaging to America.

The Philadelphians were slow in discovering his merits. His line of acting interfered with that of their favourite performers, and as he had many careless and some dissipated habits, he was far from being a favourite. This was particularly evidenced at his benefit, for which there were only a few seats taken.

This did not effect COOPER's pocket, for his benefit was guaranteed to a certain amount by his engagement with the managers. It however affected his pride, and he was determined to avoid the disgrace attendant on a "beggarly account of empty boxes." He therefore closed the bargain for 60 dollars with the man who owned the Elephant. Play bills were posted up in all directions, advertising in letters of the largest size, that the Elephant would be introduced on the stage; curiosity was all alive, and COOPER, aided by his Elephant, was honoured with an overflow.

When the winter campaign had closed, the company made a summer excursion to New-York. The Circus was fitted up for the purpose, and the most admirable acting ever witnessed in America was there exhibited. COOPER, FENNEL, MORTON, HARWOOD and BERNARD, were the most prominent male performers, and Mrs. MERRY sustained the heroine in a style of great perfection. The season opened with Venice Preserved, in which COOPER, as Pierre, made an indelible impression on the audience. A coldness had for some time subsisted between him and the manager; which induced a wish to change his situation. His engagement bound him in a penalty of about 2000 dollars, but this, it was alledged, had been already broken on the manager's part. In short, the sum was subscribed by a number of gentlemen, who engaged to advance it if necessary, and Mr. COOPER was transferred to the New-York Theatre.

With the exception of one season, in which he was at Philadelphia, where he also became a great favourite, Mr. COOPER continued in New-York till January, 1803. He then received an invitation from London. KEMBLE had quarrelled with Drury-Lane Theatre, had left it and gone on a tour to the continent of Europe. COOPER was invited to come if he felt confidence for the attempt, and was proffered KEMBLE's situation, if it should appear that he could sufficiently satisfy the town. He accordingly went, but did not succeed in London, equal to the expectation of his friends. His performances were received with much applause, but

the people there having formed their taste, on the acting of COOKE and KEMBLE, or from his real inferiority to those gentlemen, did not consider him equal to their favourites. He afterwards played for a few nights at Liverpool, with great eclat; but has since returned to America, where he has performed in the principal Theatres of the United States, and is now at Boston.

Mr. COOPER is rather above the middle size, well proportioned, with a handsome and expressive countenance, fine form, intelligent eye, and a voice admirably adapted to the stage. He excels in the weightier characters of the drama; while in those of a secondary nature, he is generally careless and indifferent. His performance is particularly distinguished for chasteness, character and energy.

The Art of Acting.

NO. I.

By THOMAS HOLCROFT, author of the Tale of Mystery, &c.

INTRODUCTION.

AMONG the numerous works which have hitherto appeared, on the Art of Acting, there are few if any that treat on that art with sufficient method and perspicuity. In general, such works have been but essays; and, though the personating the characters which poets have pourtrayed has been acknowledged to require high powers of mind, an appropriate education, peculiar personal qualifications, and uncommon accomplishments, yet those who have *written* on the subject, have chiefly confined themselves to indefinite sketches, while they have acknowledged it required uncommon abilities as well to execute as to describe the dramatic art.

It is easy to point out the deficiencies of works that have appeared, but it is difficult to avoid similar or greater defects. To attempt improvement, in any art or science, is a commendable task; and the knowledge and perseverance by which improvement is accomplished generally obtain, at least some part of, the praise which they deserve.

With an ardent love of the scenic art, a zealous desire to promote it in all its branches, an unconquerable anxiety that it should be well understood, both in principle and practice, a strong hope that those who have hitherto treated it with levity or abjured it as pernicious may change their opinion, and with something like a prophetic spirit that announces its

future influence on the morals and happiness of man, the present work is begun. These propensities, and a life in great part devoted to a study of the subject, form the chief pretensions of the writer of the present work. It may be added, that this study has been comparatively little in books, but indefatigable in the nature of the art itself, as it is at present exhibited on the stage, and as it might be. It is not meant to be insinuated that the work here undertaken will establish high claims to superiority; though great efforts are intended to be made, to promote the object in view, and to deserve approbation.

NECESSARY REQUISITES.

The first *grand requisite*, for a dramatic Artist, is power of mind: but this subject must be reserved for future consideration, and it is then intended to be insisted upon, and inquired into, on that extensive scale which a gift so essential to the formation of a great Actor demands. The next, which is almost equally indispensable, though so infinitely inferior, is a perfectly distinct articulation. Some mistakenly imagine that this is always the result of a sound intonation, and power of voice. Intonation and power of voice, when accompanied by distinct articulation, are invaluable to an Actor; but by no means so absolutely necessary. Articulation, tone, and power of voice must each of them likewise be treated of hereafter, and apart: as must all the various heads recapitulated at present, for they all demand research, developement, and detail.

Classes might be multiplied almost at pleasure, but they will all appertain, more or less, to the following:

Heroes, lovers, gentlemen, tradesmen, clowns: heroines, fine ladies, hoydens, chambermaids: characters of middle and old age, male and female.

A sketch of the qualities necessary to each of these classes is only at present intended.

Heroes. No performer can personate a hero truly unless, did events favour him, he be capable of actually becoming a hero; or, did not his reason and inclination prefer different pursuits. Let him be possessed by this magnetic power of mind, and his defects of voice and person must be excessive, if they are unconquerable. Give him that mighty power, and a distinct articulation, clearness, compass, and strength of voice, an athletic and correct symmetry of person, with pliant yet pleasing features, capable of all the varieties and the full

force of expressing the various passions, and this *imaginary actor* will be one who has never yet been beheld. Many performers, however, are on record, male and female, who, were the pictures given of them by their admirers correct, have approached, if not attained, nay, surpassed this perfection! Roscius was the father of a numerous progeny; for many have assumed or willingly accepted his name. That he was himself the essence of all that is perfect, we must now take upon trust. Admiration, in all ages, might more truly be painted blind than justice: like a stone cast into still water, it begins with raising a small circle, and from circle to circle spread, till it necessarily dies away, because it can extend no further.

Lovers. In the lover all the exterior charms, which can steal upon and enslave the female heart, should be combined: a smiling, prepossessing, yet anxious face, beauty of form, elegance of manners, sweetness of voice, passionate eyes, and susceptibility of heart, should all enrapture his mistress. Add to these the feminine beauties, graces, and accomplishments, and the description will be suitable to the other sex.

Gentlemen. The requisites to *personate this character completely* are many, and difficult indeed to attain: they are, perfect ease of deportment, even under the most embarrassing circumstances; manners that conciliate, and gain universal esteem; good breeding so disciplined as never to be thrown from its guard, or, except on the most extraordinary occasions, betrayed to the discovery of passion; a smooth and flowing enunciation; a bland gaiety of heart, that no trifles can disturb; a flattering, yet not officious, attention to every person present; and all those charms of address and demeanour which cannot fail to win our affections. There have been almost *as few gentlemen* on the Stage *as heroes.*

Tradesmen. In a certain sense, all the characters of middle life are affiliated to this class: but, as it is not here intended to individualize them, this subdivision will be deferred. The qualities of a tradesman are such as most performers, who have abilities for the dramatic art, may easily personate. Habit induces the mere tradesman to be subservient in his manner, especially to the wealthy, and on extraordinary occasions servile: he renders contradiction smooth, listens to it patiently, intends to flatter but does it awkwardly, complies with any request if his interest be not compromised, is always ready with the tradesman's bow, not only at meeting and part-

ing, but wherever it can be intruded, and his eye, attitudes, and slightest actions, wherever his interest is concerned, are all anxiously intent on and subservient to that eager desire of gain which habit has rendered a predominant passion. By the nature and extent of this, his deportment is regulated. His propensities appear on all occasions; but they appear slightly, earnestly, or extravagantly, in proportion to supposed loss or gain. It is not by this intended to depreciate a class of men, but to describe habits, which are inevitably fostered by barter and sale, unless counteracted by superiority of mind, or extraneous circumstances; and to give a picture such as an actor, who literally personates a tradesman, ought to have in contemplation.

Clowns. Rustic appearance, vacant or gazing eyes, an open mouth, arms dangling yet the shoulders raised, the toes turned inward, a shambling gait with a heavy step, great slowness of conception, and apparent stupidity of mind and manner, characterize the absolute clown. The varieties of this class, like the last, are interesting subjects of study for the stage; but are too frequently misunderstood. Vary the portrait by red ribbands, yellow petticoats, timidity, and maudlin freaks, and his counterpart is seen.

Heroines. Give feminine dignity of person, and all the qualities described under the title *heroes*, with that pervading force of sensibility which shall never vanguish though it shall often endanger heroism, and the heroine will be nearly perfect.

Fine Ladies. The fine lady is, or should be, even a more fascinating character on the stage, than that which has been pictured under the head *gentlemen;* for, to the almost attainable graces of the gentleman, she should add a continued playfulness, a visible coquetry, which, though perfectly at her command, should appear spontaneous, and an ample mixture of delightful caprice, which she evidently indulges only to make herself more captivating. Should the actress suffer the least vulgarity to appear, in either walk, attitude, dress, or enunciation, the fine lady instantly vanishes. Her *dress* is of so much consequence, that the moment she appears, her character should be visible; and this *art of dress* is only to be attained by the study of that which is almost simplicity itself; or would be, were she but to take away a very few ornaments, tastefully selected and admirably placed, by which she intends to be distinguished.

Hoydens. A hoyden exhibits herself by an impatient readiness to romp, eagerness to contradict, fretfulness if contradicted, vehement wishes to enjoy, dress that is ridiculous by exceeding the fashion, and while absurd in manner, loud of voice, and a total stranger to good breeding, by an air of excessive self-satisfaction.

Chambermaids. Volubility, pertness, a prevailing sense of self-importance, irksome curiosity, uncommon acuteness in all that relates to family secrets, extreme ignorance of every thing beyond her sphere, impatience to prattle, timidity when overawed, and a pleasure in being rude when she dare, are most of them what the chambermaid supposes to be her peculiar airs and graces.

Middle and old age. In the various stages of declining life, though the passions are less strong, many of the evil habits of youth become rooted, and should appear mingled with the propensities which prevail in age. Among these propensities are, anxiety concerning trifles, increasing avarice, obstinacy, a petulent inclination to contradict, a gradual disregard of good breeding, ceremony, and dress, uncontrollable peevishness, and change of voice, walk, and carriage; all which qualities are to be regulated partly by age, but still more by the mental strength or debility of the character supposed.

In the personification of the above classes, and of all the characters which are allied to them, the peculiar study of the actor should be directed to understand the limits of insipidity and exaggeration.

Some of these delineations may appear to refer only to the mind: but a good performer well knows that the body is entirely regulated by that which passes in the mind; and, so true an interpreter is action, that words, after they are spoken, seem only to elucidate what appeared before, though it had been but imperfectly understood.

REMARK.

It is an observation as current as it is just, that "*the height of acting* IS NOT TO ACT." We should be happy to observe some actors on the American Stage, endeavoring to attain the *height* of *acting*.

The American Stage.

*Imitatio vitæ, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis.....*Cicero.
The Imitation of Life...the Mirror of Manners...the Representation of Truth.

THEATRICAL REGISTER.

"'Tis with our judgments, as our watches....none
"Go just alike....but each believes his own."

THE long expected, and long wished for play of "WHO WANTS A GUINEA?" has been at length brought forward, and was first represented in this City, on Monday Evening last, with much approbation. The younger *Colman*, its ingenious Author, has frequently entertained both Europe and America, with the productions of his pen; which was never more successfully employed, than in this charming comedy. The characters, are well delineated; the plot is natural, interesting and impressive....and for the purpose of presenting it to our readers, we have selected the following *analysis* from an European publication, of acknowledged merit.

"The scene is laid in England.—*Mr. Torrent* a man of the most generous disposition, goes down to the country to take possession of an estate which he has purchased, resolved to spend his large fortune in diffusing happiness around him. A dreadful fire had destroyed a great part of the neighbouring village upon the eve of his arrival; such is the excess of his benevolence, that he rejoices in the event, because it affords him an opportunity of relieving the sufferrers. Among the persons whom he first meets at a neighbouring inn is *Barford* an old officer, who had escaped with difficulty from the fury of the flames, with the miserable remnant of his property tied up in a bundle. *Torrent* presses him to accept a sum of money, but in a manner that hurts his pride, and the offer is refused with indignation. Resolved, however, not to be put out of his way, *Torrent* contrives to slip his pocket-book, with a large sum of money, into the bundle, which *Barford* carries away, unconscious of this addition to its contents. *Torrent* is followed by *Fanny*, a beautiful young girl, whom he has hired to be his housekeeper in the country, accompanied by *Jonathan Oldskirt*, an humble and benevolent London shop-keeper, who had been very kind to her, and comes to see her settled in her new place. They are accidentally separated, and *Fanny* proceeds, in mistake, to a wrong house. It is the seat of a nobleman, and is inhabited by *Sir Larry M'Murraugh*, an Irish baronet, who had lost all his fortune at play, and is sent there out of the way of his creditors; *Bang*, a drunken Yorkshire huntsman, and *Mrs. Glastonbury*, an old house-keeper. Here *Fanny* is in a most embarrassed state, arising from the jealousy of the old house-keeper,

who thinks she comes to supplant her ; and the addresses of *Sir Larry* assisted by the drunken Yorkshireman. Meanwhile *Jonathan Oldskirt* goes to the house of *Torrent*, who supposes him to be a new land steward, employed by his agent in London. A scene ensues, in which the *equivoque* is well managed. It is closed by *Barford*, who, having discovered the pocket-book in his bundle, comes to return it to *Torrent*. The interest which the piece possesses commences here. From a letter in the pocket-book, from *Fanny* to her master, *Barford* discovers that *Torrent* is the brother of an officer, since dead, who had seduced his wife, and that *Fanny* is his only daughter, whom her mother had carried off, and he had never seen nor heard of since her infancy. All the parties now join in pursuit of *Fanny*, in which they are assisted by *Henry*, a young sailor, her lover, and she is at last traced to the house inhabited by *Sir Larry*, where she is discovered, and restored to her friends, who bestow her hand upon her lover; while *Torrent*, by discharging a large debt, due by his brother to *Barford*, enables them all to live happy."

Having thus given a brief retrospect of the story on which this excellent play is founded, it becomes proper for us to take a view of its performance on our stage. Mr. TYLER's personation of *Barford*, alias *Delamere*—discovered judgment, taste and ability. In the scene with *Torrent* in which he reveals to him the treachery of his brother, he was particularly happy :—and in truth we never heard so few words given with so much *expression*, as was *Barford's* exclamation when he meets his long lost daughter.—"*O God! my child!!*" was pronounced in a manner which so excited our feelings that with all our struggles we were unable to restrain the progress of the gushing tear.

Mrs. JONES cannot be otherwise than excellent. *Fanny*, was represented with a sweetness and delicacy peculiar to herself. Her *epilogue* was inimitable ; and the song which she introduced into the part, was received with the most rapturous applause. She is, speaking without flattery, the most fascinating and *really deserving actress*, that ever trod the American stage.

Mr. JOHNSON in *Torrent* was very respectable. ROBINSON's well known characteristics, dullness and inanimation, were surprisingly apparent in his *Heartly*.

Mr. BARRETT's *Sir Larry M'Murrah*, is one of the best characters in which we have seen him. If he were always what he was in "*Who wants a Guinea?*" he would always be *highly deserving*.*

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* Mr. B. has not yet corrected his pronunciation of *memoirs* (see Walker's dictionary,) noticed in Mr. COLEMAN's able criticism.

Mr. YOUNG certainly *excelled* in *Henry*.—We are happy to observe his endeavor to correct some deficiencies in his manner—which little *desagreables* completely overcome, will entitle him to our fullest commendation. DEMOSTHENES of old, had every disadvantage to struggle with—*perseverence*, united with *care*, only made *him* an *orator*—the same attention may certainly make an *actor*.

Mr. HOGG was inimitable in *Solomon Gundy*; Mr. MARTIN was excellent in *Andrew Bang*,—and his son was very meritorious in his representation of the benevolent child of *Hogmore*.

Mr. BAILEY never played with more applause, than in *Jonathan Oldskirt*; yet he was not fanltless—for in representing the benevolent clown, he somewhat "o'erstepp'd the modesty of nature."

From the success of the first representation, we trust "*Who wants a Guinea?*" will be played, till town and country are enabled to attend the Theatre, in order to resolve a question so easily answered.

Fugitive Lucubrations.

FOR THE THESPIAN MIRROR.

POETRY, like its sister *Gallantry*, languishes in the gloom of barbarity and ignorance. A solitary Harp may sometimes be heard in the wilderness; but its timid note soon sinks into silence. Not a flower springs to deck the brows of the Bard, and woman that should weave them, is by ignorance disrobed of her enchantment. In those days when all the virtues were cherished with a reference to *woman*, gallantry furnished the *pretext*, while the Bard gave the spirit of war. "The songs of the hundred Harps" poured enthusiasm into the breast of the warrior, or melted him into sadness; it mingled with the shouts of victory, and reanimated the hope and spirits of the vanquished.

A certain writer remarks, "that a Poet who writes in rhyme, is like a person *dancing in fetters*." Opposed to this, is a little French epigram, which I have somewhere met with. The Poet illustrates his position, by alluding to a stream which increases in impetuosity and depth, with every contraction of its waters. B.

Dramatic Anecdote.

"Holland," says old Charles Macklin, "I shall live longer than Garrick, and if he will deposit 500*l.* in the hands of a banker, I will deposit the same sum, and the longest liver shall be entitled to the thousand pounds; you may tell him so from me." "No," replied Holland, "I will not tell him so, but I will take the wager myself." "Not so," rejoined Shylock, "not so!—*Sir, I will have the benefit of his fears.*"

Poetry.

LINES,

Addressed to Mrs. JONES of the New-York Theatre.

Haste impassion'd Bard to greet her,
Hov'ring like enchantment, near!
Lo! the fairy form and feature!
Hark the wood note wild and clear!

Who art thou so skill'd in numbers?
Beauteous, warbling stranger tell!
E'er thy accents broke its slumbers,
Silent lay the vocal shell.

Sure that note so soft ascending,
Mingles with thy bosom's sigh—
'Tis a strain of Heav'n, attending
Virtue to her native sky.

Oh thou'lt melt *his* soul to sadness
Whom the world hath taught despair;
Oft thy sportive note of gladness
For a while shall cheat his care.

And should it e'er be thine to languish,
Hope, and love, and rapture flown;
Losing all *his* bosoms anguish,
He will weep for *thee* alone!

☞ *The Author of the foregoing inimitable effusion, (first published in the* Evening Post,) *having learnt some interesting particulars of the domestic history of Mrs. J. furnished the Editor of the* Thespian Mirror, *with the following additional and equally beautiful couplets, addressed to the same lady.*

Oh! blest is the moment, sweet warbler! and long
Shall its raptures be mingled with memory's sigh,
That gives us thy tenderness, beauty, and song,
And the glow of thy heart in the gleam of thine eye!

Dear to *thee* be that moment! still dearer than those
When the first lisp of infancy murmur'd its pray'r—
For the tempest once past; Oh how sweet is repose!
And virtue how bright, when she dawns from despair.

LODINUS.

[*The following beautiful lines, which, nor a Thompson's nor a Cowper's Muse might deem unworthy their exalted names, were enclosed to the Editor of the Thespian Mirror, revised and corrected by the author, since their first appearance in the Evening Post of Monday last.*]

TO MRS. JOHNSON.

On seeing her personate Belvidera.

DAUGHTER of passion and of tears! thee all
That fancy muses in her saddest vigils,
Thee the Poet hails! With flutt'ring pulse,
With eye still moist; and sorrow-troubled touch,
He wakes the lyre. Oh ever may it wake
To virtue, tenderness and truth like thine!
Forever silent be that string, o'er which
The sigh of beauty steals, and steals in vain;
Nor yet to sadness sacred, nor to thee!
That fails to kindle, when the Muse's wand
In well-imagin'd anguish veils a form,
True to the softest lineaments of grace—
Bright as the fairy forms of shadowy mien,
Celestial, that on sailing pinions watch
O'er sleeping innocence, or guard unseen
The parted spirit to its native sky.
The harp that hung (so sings the fabling Muse)
Unconscious thro' the dreary hours of gloom,
In tones melifluous hail'd th' approach of dawn;
And on the startled silence of the waste
Shed wild mysterious music. So the Bard
Thou bid'st awake, transported by thy charms,
That break upon him like the dawn of day,
Unveils their elegance. The graceful brow
Of conscious majesty; the tender tear,
And all the soft enchantment of thy pow'rs,
To *virtue* sacred, he allots to *fame*.
And Oh! believe his artless song, with life
Thy mem'ry will not perish, for the sighs
Of visionary sorrow, that have own'd
The melting magic of thy pow'rs; await
Their sweet remembrance when those pow'rs have slept,—
And beauty, as she treads the moonlight turf,
Moist with the tear of memory, shall sigh
"Such were the tears her BELVIDERA drew."

LODINUS.

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